Bush/Harper? Canadian and American Evangelical Politics Compared

Jonathan Malloy

Carleton University

Religion and politics remain very complex issues in both Canada and the United States, and ripe for caricature and overstatement. While a Canadian Christian Right has arisen and finds some affinity with the Harper government, we should not assume that Canada will see anywhere near the visibility and influence of the American Christian Right. There is also some evidence of a new, more moderate American evangelical political presence, especially at the dawn of the Obama presidency, although we should be careful not to overstate this either. Differences between Canada and the United States may not be quite as large and clear-cut as they once were when it comes to evangelical Christians and politics, but the role of religion in public life and politics remains distinctly different in the two countries.

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On the night in January 2006 when he became prime minister, Stephen Harper thanked Canadians for the victory and promised to govern in “a spirit of hope, not fear.” But then Mr. Harper concluded his speech with the phrase “God bless Canada.”

Such a fearsome hullabaloo followed. Toronto Star columnist Linda McQuaig found Mr. Harper’s words “ominous.” The Vancouver Sun’s Barbara Yaffe declared him “crass.” Sue Montgomery told Montreal Gazette readers that Mr. Harper had raised the “red flag” of religion. Other commentators said he was “unCanadian.” Still others concluded he was under the influence of a malign puppet master, U.S. President George W. Bush, Mr. Harper’s “buddy south of the border,” as Ms. Montgomery put it.1

The concurrent 2008 Canadian and American elections present an excellent opportunity to assess the place of religion and politics in the two countries, especially the role of evangelical Christians and the “Christian Right.” As Canadian journalist Robert Sibley notes above, there is considerable tension about the role of religion in Canadian politics, with a strong implication of American influence and spillover across the border. It is common to see assertions that mixing religion – especially evangelical Christianity – and politics is “unCanadian.” “We mainstream Canadians,” writes Margaret Wente in the Globe and Mail, “like to congratulate ourselves that we’re immune from the fundamentalist religious mania that exerts such an alarming grip on American public life.”2

This political distinction builds on the larger assumption that Canadians are far less religious, or at least publicly religious, than Americans. Pollster Michael Adams argues that evangelicalism and religiosity in general are one of the most distinctive differences between Canada and the United States.3 And the long-time student of Canadian–American differences, S.M. Lipset, asserted in 1990 that “[t]he differences between religion in Canada and the United States are large and clear-cut.”4
Evangelicals themselves paint a similar picture. Canadian evangelicals lament the minimal presence of religion in public life compared to the United States. Brian Stiller, the former head of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, writes that “the only time, it seems, that Christian faith is called on [in Canadian public life] to serve is for ceremony or the funeral of a Canadian political or cultural icon.” Canadian evangelicals like to note the contrast between each country’s September 11 national memorial services: the American service was held in the National Cathedral with prayers and extensive clergy involvement; the Canadian service was held on Parliament Hill without religious trappings and (reportedly) did not once refer to God or even a vague higher power. This idea of religion and politics as a no-go zone in Canadian politics is noted by former Reform Party leader Preston Manning, who writes, “[A]nyone who tries to relate their personal or religious faith to public policy or political action in Canada can expect to be grossly misrepresented and misunderstood.”

However, the Conservative Party under Stephen Harper has created a muddier picture of religion and Canadian politics. What Sibley calls a “hullabaloo” can be found in numerous accounts of the Harper government – with headlines in major publications such as “Stephen Harper and the Theocons,” “In Ottawa, Faith Makes a Leap to the Right,” and “Christian Movement Has Ear of Harper Government.” These accounts typically argue that Harper and other key Conservatives are evangelical Christians with a socially conservative agenda; and that this agenda is deeply American-inspired and American-driven. This is argued by many American critics as well: “Harper is rapidly building an alliance with the worst elements of the US Christian Right,” wrote Chris Hedges in *The Nation*.

Stephen Harper speaks very little about his private religious beliefs, but there is general acceptance, particularly among evangelicals themselves, that he is an evangelical Christian. This is quite different from prime ministers of the last forty years, all of whom were Roman Catholic except for Kim Campbell. Similarly, in the United States, George W. Bush was by far the most openly evangelical president in modern history. Whether coincidence or conspiracy, these religious similarities have led many to argue that the two leaders shared a similar agenda to reshape society – especially sexual and reproductive rights – in an evangelical image.

In this essay, I will argue that the role that religion and politics together play is converging – slightly – between the two countries. There is, in fact, a new American-style religious right in Canada. But there are also changes in the United States, including the growing visibility of American evangelicals outside the religious right and President Barack Obama’s more liberal understanding of the role of faith and public life. In this way, both countries may be increasingly mirroring each other. Still, there are important differences, and in both countries we must differentiate between media reports and the reality in the pews. Overall, the religious connections and contrasts between Canadians and Americans have always been varied and complex, and they will continue to be in the future.

**Historical perspectives**

Scholars of history, religion, and sociology have long argued that Canada and the United States have very different religious traditions – “large and clear-cut,” in the words of Lipset. These differences take several forms. One is the much larger Roman Catholic presence in Canada – approximately half the Canadian population but only a quarter of the United States. A second is the long institutionalization of the Anglican Church as the *de jure* and later *de facto* official state church in Canada, in contrast to the explicit rejection
of an American state church. A third is the evolution of Protestantism and its evangelical variants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a greater American tendency to split into fundamentalist and modernist strains while Canadian denominations remained more united.\(^\text{13}\)

Civil religious identity developed differently in the two countries. Andrew Kim documents how in Canada the Catholic Church and the semi-official Anglican Church competed with “their own religious visions of how Canada should be,” a discussion hampered further by linguistic and regional divides.\(^\text{14}\) This eventually led to dwindling influence by both in public life and the diminution of religious references in public life. In contrast, the United States has developed a strong sense of religion – i.e., Christianity – as a fundamental aspect of national identity, with religious references and dimensions commonplace. This contrast is so strong that Canadian references to religion may be automatically interpreted as unwanted Americanisms, as we see in the discussion over Harper’s earlier-quoted “God bless Canada” statement.

On the other hand, American historian Mark Noll argues that until the 1960s Canada was “more observant in religious practice and more orthodox in religious opinion” than the United States.\(^\text{15}\) Not only was Catholic and Anglican influence highly institutionalized in the state, but Canadians attended church more than Americans, and mainstream Protestant denominations still had a strong evangelical streak, rather than the modernist/evangelical split found in the United States. But “in retrospect,” Noll writes, “it is clear that the apparent vigor of the Canadian churches in the 1940s and 1950s owed more to the cohesive nationalism of the war effort and the search for normalcy during a postwar economic expansion than to religious dynamism in the churches themselves.”\(^\text{16}\) In contrast, American (Protestant) Christianity has long been a teeming and dynamic enterprise that constantly renews itself. Hence, Americans now attend church significantly more than Canadians, and religion is much more present in American than Canadian public life.

Looking specifically at evangelical Christians, there are clearly more in the United States than in Canada, though we don’t know exactly how many. Researchers often have trouble measuring evangelical numbers, and different criteria and methods can yield quite different results.\(^\text{17}\) For example, a 2004 *Maclean’s* magazine survey found that 31 percent of Canadians declared themselves “born-again Christians,”\(^\text{18}\) but sociologist Kurt Bowen uses Statistics Canada studies to suggest that the number of “conservative Protestants” in 2001 was only 5.5 percent.\(^\text{19}\) Similar wide discrepancies are found in the United States, in which up to half the population can be classified as “born-again.” Nevertheless, the trends seem to suggest that American evangelicals appear to be about double the proportion of Canadian evangelicals. For example, Hoover et al. suggested in 2002 that Canadians were about 10 to 12 percent evangelical, compared to 25 to 33 percent of Americans.\(^\text{20}\)

There are strong cross-border links between Canadian and American evangelicals. Samuel Reimer documents the shared “evangelical subculture” of churches, businesses, educational institutions, media, and other organizations that spans the Canada–US border. This subculture manifests itself in both spiritual and social ways, emphasizing close connections between private spiritual beliefs and everyday life and strong links to evangelical churches and other evangelicals. Much like the general Canadian population, Canadian evangelicals mostly consume American evangelical books, music, and videos; a visit to a Canadian “Christian bookstore” will find very little Canadian content. While Christian radio and television stations were previously discouraged by Canadian regulators,\(^\text{21}\) they are now increasing in number as part of the general rise in specialty channels and outlets, and they deliver a stream of American evangelical music and cultural content along with some homegrown Canadian programming. Major American evangelical figures like
megachurch pastors Rick Warren and Bill Hybels are equally popular north and south of the 49th parallel. This subculture binds evangelicals together across the border, so that Reimer argues “evangelicals . . . in both countries resemble each other far more than they resemble their fellow countrymen.”

Outlooks on the state

But while evangelicals share a cross-border subculture in social and spiritual ways, this congruence is not as evident in outlooks toward the state and public issues. Reimer asserts that “the biggest and most consistent differences between evangelicals north and south of the border show up in the realm of politics.” His own survey finds that, when discussing politics, “Americans are more likely to emphasize moral problems while Canadians are more likely to raise economic problems.” Similarly, S.M. Lipset writes that “Americans are more likely to see [political] conflicts as reflecting moral concerns.” Hoover cites survey evidence and interviews with evangelical leaders to suggest that Canadian evangelicals are less right-wing than American evangelicals, and Hoover et al., in comparing the political views of American and Canadian evangelicals, found Canadians more supportive of state intervention in the economy and attempts to alleviate economic inequalities.

Mark Noll suggests that Canadian evangelicals operate in a necessarily smaller world that either encourages or at least necessitates more cooperation both between evangelicals themselves and with other Christian denominations and the larger society. He thus finds “a different set of expectations for relations between church and state” in Canada, reflecting their historic connections, rather than official separation, as in the United States. George Rawlyk suggests that Canadian evangelicals are more “‘irenic,’ with an ‘accommodating quality.’” And Trevor Harrison says that “[h]istorically, evangelicalism in Canada was more often of the left variety while its counterpart in the US was of the right,” with figures like Baptist minister and Saskatchewan premier Tommy Douglas and the Canadian social gospel movements of the mid-twentieth century.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, American evangelicals became more politically visible with the rise of the Christian Right. It’s hard to define and place boundaries on exactly what the Christian Right is and how it relates to the larger concept of evangelicals. However, leading Christian Right figures such as Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority, and later Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition, combined evangelical identity with strongly right-wing political stances and with explicit involvement in political lobbying and campaigns (almost entirely through the Republican Party). Strongly opposed to abortion and sexual orientation rights, they were also conservative on broader social and economic issues, as well as foreign policy, with strongly anti-Communist and pro-Israel views.

Was there a Canadian Christian Right in the 1980s? The rise of the Moral Majority and similar groups was paralleled in Canada by the expansion of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) under Brian Stiller in the mid-1980s. While the EFC had existed as a small umbrella organization since the 1960s, Stiller made it a more active and prominent actor on the public scene. He and his organization spoke out on abortion, sexual orientation, pornography, gambling, and other “moral” issues, meeting with national political leaders and appearing before parliamentary committees, and distributing pamphlets and information to churches on these issues. This often involved working with more Catholic-dominated groups, especially pro-life groups.

However, not only was the EFC dwarfed in resources compared to the larger American organizations, but it specifically eschewed direct involvement in partisan politics or candidate endorsements. While this was partly due to the EFC’s status as a charitable organization,
it was primarily an explicit choice by Stiller and his associates. As noted above, the EFC concentrated on “moral” issues rather than broader economic, social, and foreign issues; and when it did address such broader issues, it took moderate or socially progressive positions – for example, on homelessness, social assistance, and international development. Most notably, Stiller endorsed Bill C-43, the 1990 compromise abortion bill, after the Morgentaler decision struck down Canada’s existing abortion law. This bill angered both pro-life and pro-choice activists, since it allowed various exceptions but continued to criminalize abortion and restrict freedom of choice. Stiller was consulted on the bill and endorsed it as the best compromise possible, while most Catholic pro-life groups opposed it.

In short, Canada did not develop an equivalent to the American Christian Right in the 1980s. While strongly conservative on issues of sexuality and reproduction, the 1980s EFC avoided a full-blown Christian Right image of conservative militancy on all issues and steered clear of involvement with conservative parties. While Focus on the Family (FOTF) Canada was founded in 1983 as an associate of James Dobson’s large American organization, it acted similarly to the EFC in this era, emphasizing parliamentary committee appearances and private meetings, and avoiding candidate endorsements. Other, more marginal organizations, such as Ken Campbell’s Renaissance Canada, were more outspoken and confrontational in Canada, especially on abortion, but lacked the broad support and legitimacy among evangelicals of the EFC. However, as we will see below, newer groups arose in the late 1990s and 2000s that more closely resembled the American Christian Right.

Why did Canada not see a major Christian Right in the 1980s? One reason is the differing nature of the neighboring political systems. Scholars have noted that the Canadian and American systems provide very different “political opportunity structures” for evangelicals. The American system of separate powers, politically appointed senior officials, and looser political parties presents more openings for influence, compared to the more concentrated power of the Canadian parliamentary system. For example, although party discipline has increased in American politics, congressional representatives are still more open to lobbying pressure than members of Parliament, who normally vote in unison with their party and leaders. Another distinction, noted particularly by Harrison, is resource mobilization. American evangelicals are bigger both in proportion and of course in sheer numbers, leading to more critical mass and economies of scale that can sustain large political organizations, mass communications, and other instruments. The result is a much bigger, slicker, and far more organized evangelical political presence in American politics.

However, there is less consensus about whether institutional and resource differences tell the whole story. If not for them, would American and Canadian evangelicals act in politically similar ways? This is a tricky question. Earlier we noted the historical differences between the two groups – but also the strong shared subculture and affinities. We also saw evidence that Canadian and American evangelicals approach politics in different ways, with Americans more inclined to see issues in moral terms and Canadians more prone to avoid conflict. So is it simply institutional and/or resource barriers that prevent Canadian evangelicals from becoming as prominent and vocal as American evangelicals? Or have the barriers perhaps shaped evangelical political thinking and behavior? Or are Canadian and American evangelicals genuinely different – not because of institutional shaping but because of their different national societies and theological traditions and histories? All three explanations – resource mobilization, institutional shaping, and sociological differences – are plausible. To test them further, we must look to more recent events.
The 2000s

The first decade of the new century has seen several interesting shifts in evangelical political activity in both countries. Canadian evangelicals have become more visibly active in Canadian politics, for example, while George W. Bush relied on an evangelical political base more than any of his predecessors, with that base’s turnout likely deciding the 2004 presidential election. But we have also seen more diversification of evangelical movements. David Kirkpatrick and other recent writers suggest a growing division in American evangelicalism between traditional conservative activists and a newer generation that is neither exclusively right nor exclusively left, with growing interest in the environment, international development, and social justice. The 2008 presidential race reversed the usual polarizations, with John McCain, a non-evangelical Republican with a history of criticizing the Christian Right, and Barack Obama, a Democrat who referred regularly to religious and spiritual imagery – not to mention the evangelical but also non-traditional Sarah Palin. And in the opposite direction, Canada appears to have two different streams of activists – the more traditional, non-confrontation approach, but also a newer, bolder Christian Right of its own.

The late 1990s and the 2000s saw the development of several new Canadian evangelical groups and actors. The Canadian Family Action Coalition (CFAC), founded in 1998, is strongly opposed to abortion and gay rights; and, unlike the EFC and FOTF Canada, it is not constrained by charitable tax status to limit its political activities. CFAC was founded by Charles McVety, who heads a number of organizations: he is president of Canada Christian College and founder of the Institute for Canadian Values and of Canadian Christians United for Israel. And evangelicals Preston Manning and Stockwell Day became prominent Canadian party leaders.

Focus on the Family Canada itself became more politically active, releasing lists prior to the 2004 election on MPs’ votes on marriage issues and launching an advertising campaign in major Canadian newspapers: “We Believe in Mom and Dad. We Believe in Marriage.” However, these efforts were curbed once the election began and third-party advertising regulations took effect. In 2006, the organization opened an Ottawa office, the Institute on Marriage and the Family, which lobbies for traditional family views (but does not endorse candidates). Other organizations, such as Tristan Emmanuel’s Christians in the Public Square, Craig Chandler’s Concerned Christians Canada Inc., and Faytene Kriskow’s 4 MY Canada, were all founded in the early or mid-2000s.

The newer groups more closely resembled the American Christian Right in several ways. They were expressly political pressure groups without charitable status, while EFC and FOTF Canada mixed advocacy with other services and programs for evangelicals. This gave the new groups wide leeway to endorse and target political candidates. Concerned Christians Canada (CCC), for example, took out billboard advertisements against local Calgary candidates and openly campaigned against the Liberal Party. (CCC founder Craig Chandler also ran for the Progressive Conservative national leadership in 2003, running last to Peter Mackay.) It’s difficult to measure the influence of these groups, but they contrast sharply with the efforts by the EFC in particular to avoid explicitly favoring particular parties or candidates.

The newer Canadian groups chose publicity and confrontation in an attempt to mobilize their base and polarize public opinion, a typical Christian Right strategy. The groups sought media profiles and publicity, organized demonstrations on Parliament Hill, and generally used more confrontational and direct language. This was reciprocated in the media, leading to many of the stories in mid-decade about a new rising Christian Right
and the emergence of figures like Tristan Emmanuel into the public eye. But as Michael Valpy argues, it was “a small voice that possibly has won more media attention than its numbers can lay claim to,” because, he argues, “of the media’s addiction to controversy and because of the size of the American Christian Right next door.”

Perhaps most interestingly, the new groups and activists often explicitly linked themselves to the American Christian Right. The multi-organization head Charles McVety invited former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed to speak to a 2005 Toronto gathering, a polarizing act widely noticed in the national media. Tristan Emmanuel also headed an organization called “Canadians for Bush” to support the American president. And Jim Blake of Concerned Christians Canada told me in an interview that he saw little difference between the politics of the two countries, which address the same basic struggles. This is in sharp contrast to the EFC and even FOTF Canada (despite the latter’s American parent). Those two groups take pains to emphasize their Canadian distinctiveness and downplay or qualify American links. Thus, FOTF Canada notes that only its service materials (i.e., parenting guides) come from the United States; its magazine and other efforts are Canadian-based. In other words, while the traditional groups avoid American comparisons, the newer groups had no such fears and even embraced such links.

What spurred on these new, more American-style groups? I have argued elsewhere that same-sex marriage provided an unusual political opportunity for Canadian evangelicals. First, the House of Commons held several free votes on the definition of marriage, in which MPs had to take positions – presenting a chance for evangelicals to pressure those politicians as individuals. Second, although MPs voted freely, the issue largely followed partisan lines, with nearly all Conservatives opposed to same-sex marriage, nearly all NDP (and BQ) members in favor, and most Liberals (including the party leaders) in favor as well. This added clarity and visibility to the evangelicals’ cause in three ways. Not only could the newer Christian Right groups endorse and target specific candidates, but traditional organizations could also lobby against same-sex marriage without having to explicitly endorse parties or candidates. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the issue of same-sex marriage brought the EFC, FOTF Canada, and the newer groups together in opposition (although not always in actual unity); while they may differ somewhat on other sexual orientation rights and their level of militancy, evangelicals generally see heterosexual marriage as fundamental to their beliefs.

Yet while some Canadian evangelicals were shifting closer to the American Christian Right, some American evangelicals were moving further away from it. As mentioned earlier, American evangelicals seem to be going through generational and ideological shifts of their own. While US evangelicals remain overwhelmingly opposed to reproductive choice and same-sex marriage, these polarizing issues are downplayed by a growing number of evangelical leaders and organizations in favor of issues such as international development and AIDS relief, homelessness and poverty, and the environment. Tied to this is an increasing non- or bipartisanship on the part of evangelicals, rather than implicit or explicit links to the Republican Party. The most prominent figure in the new movement is Rick Warren, the megachurch pastor and bestselling author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The Purpose-Driven Church*, who held a forum in August 2008 in which John McCain and Barack Obama answered questions about their faith and views. Warren endorsed neither candidate, either at that forum or thereafter, and was later asked to give the invocation at Obama’s inauguration. While Obama was criticized for this choice because of Warren’s continued opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion rights, Warren remains far less militant than James Dobson or other prominent figures of the earlier generation.
While US evangelicals continue to vote mostly Republican, there are increasing links and connections between the Democratic Party and moderate evangelicals who are not part of the Christian Right. Figures such as Jim Wallis, Ron Sider, and Tony Campolo present a so-called “evangelical left” that emphasizes social justice over reproduction and sexuality issues, following traditions of the social gospel and earlier figures such as William Jennings Bryan. It is difficult to gauge the real impact and recent influence of these efforts – indeed, they may, once again, be more a case of growing media notice than real changes among evangelicals. But they signify, to a greater extent than in the 1980s and 1990s, a distinct alternative to the Christian Right among American evangelicals. And even if evangelicals continue to vote Republican, largely on the basis of pro-life and anti-same-sex marriage views, leaders such as Warren signify a detachment from partisan politics that was not evident in the Christian Right of Falwell and Robertson and their own successors.

Overall, the trends mirror each other across the border. Canada has seen a growing American-style Christian Right that challenges the existing non-partisan, moderate evangelical establishment. The United States gives signs of evolving challenges to the longstanding Christian Right. However, in both cases it is difficult to gauge actual impacts, and especially to separate media attention from real changes.

**Harper/Bush?**

This brings us to 2008 and the figures of Stephen Harper and George W. Bush. Critics of the Harper Conservative government have often tried to link it to the Bush administration – most notably, with Liberal Party election ads in 2008 that used the slogan “Harper/Bush.” These links cover economic, trade, and foreign policy, but also – implicitly or explicitly – suggest a shared Christian Right social conservative agenda. The simmering idea of a hidden Harper agenda was expressed by Krishna Rau, writing during the 2008 election: “Harper’s many religious allies, supporters and MPs are just waiting for a majority government to allow them the opportunity to roll back the gains that gays, lesbians and other minorities have made over the years” – especially same-sex marriage.

The assumption was that (1) the Harper Conservatives shared George W. Bush’s and the American Christian Right’s strong views against same-sex marriage and abortion, and (2) were prepared to pursue these priorities once they had sufficient power. Such interpretations naturally took a highly negative view of the Bush administration’s links to evangelicals, although some argued that these links were overstated and often ineffective. Still, there was clearly a strong evangelical sheen to Bush personally and to his administration, with key achievements such as conservative judicial appointments, sexual abstinence policies (both domestically and in international development), and continuing strong resistance to sexual-orientation and reproductive rights.

There is more and more evidence of an evangelical–Conservative affinity in Canada, with parallels to the longstanding links between evangelicals and the Republican Party. This was not always the case; as recently as 1997, Hoover found that over half (55 percent) of Canadian “Christian Right” sympathizers favored the Liberal Party. But James Guth and Fraser found that evangelicals in the mid-1990s were more likely to support the Reform Party, and Michael Lutzting and J. Matthew Wilson also found strong “moral conservative” (i.e., not necessarily “evangelical”) support for the Reform party. Andrew Grenville found that in the 2006 election, two-thirds of “Protestants who attend church weekly” voted for the Conservatives – a 25 percent increase from 2004. Assuming this category...
of Protestants is similar to evangelicals, it suggests a further surge to the Conservatives – although Grenville cautions that the key determinant was “cleaning up corruption” rather than same-sex marriage. And Barry Kay reports that in the 2006 election, 63 percent of “evangelical Protestants” supported the Conservative Party (compared to 36 percent of Catholics and 38 percent of United Church members). These studies are often not comparable because of methodological differences and varying definitions of evangelicals. Nonetheless, they do suggest a growing affinity between evangelicals and the Conservative Party, especially under Stephen Harper.

The question of Stephen Harper’s hidden social conservative agenda, however, remains in the eye of the beholder. We see what we want to see. Depending on one’s perspective, Harper’s privacy about his beliefs can be seen as appropriate discretion or chilling evidence of a secret agenda. His government’s holding of a second vote on same-sex marriage in December 2006 (on one week’s notice after months of prevaricating) could be the first attempt to roll back gay rights, or a remarkable fast one pulled on social conservatives, meeting a campaign promise but offering virtually no chance of success. His government’s cancellation of national daycare, cutbacks to women’s programs, and ham-handed cuts to arts funding can be interpreted either as fiscal or social conservative initiatives. Linda Diebel writes in the Toronto Star, “In his struggle to unite the right, Harper has been skillful in having others see their conservative philosophy mirrored in his.” In the same way, opponents of social conservatism easily see a social conservative agenda lurking behind every Harper action, especially given the high visibility of new Canadian Christian Right figures such as Charles McVety. But the influence of these new groups in the new government is much less clear and is in fact highly contested. Furthermore, Harper has explicitly said that his government will not revisit either abortion or same-sex marriage laws.

So is there a Harper/Bush affinity? As with so many of the matters raised in this essay, the evidence is mixed. But I argue that the affinity is weak and highly overstated, at least with regard to evangelical and social conservative policies. We must look at the historic differences between the two countries and the important institutional and resource constraints on Canadian evangelicals. The Canadian Christian Right is new and weak, compared to the more established and moderate Canadian groups that deliberately avoid that label. Moreover, the social conservative initiatives of the Harper government are easily overstated and can be interpreted in various ways. Finally, we must be alert to shifts and changes in the United States, especially the possibility of a new, less overtly politicized type of evangelical public activism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, evangelicals, religion, and politics remain very complex issues in both Canada and the United States, ripe for caricature and overstatement. Strong empirical research is often lacking, leaving the media and activists to shape our understanding through short-term events and reports. While a Canadian Christian Right has arisen and finds some affinity with the Harper government, we should not assume that Canada will see anywhere near the visibility and influence of the American Christian Right. There is also, as noted, some evidence of a new, more moderate American evangelical political presence, especially at the dawn of the Obama presidency, although we should be careful not to overstate this either. Differences between Canada and the United States may not be quite as large and clear-cut as they once were, but the role of religion in public life and politics remains distinctly different in the two countries.
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Notes
16. Ibid., 256.
23. Ibid., 6.
24. Ibid., 125.
29. Ibid.
33. For a relatively recent justification of opposition to C-43, see Jalsevac (2006).
34. Tarrow (1993).
37. Interview with Jim Blake, National Chairman, Concerned Christians Canada Inc., Calgary, November 2006.
41. Interview with Jim Blake, November 2006.
42. Malloy (forthcoming).
44. Ibid., 181.

Notes on contributor

Jonathan Malloy is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University. His research and teaching focus is on Canadian political institutions and religion and politics.

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